

ST. PAUL'S ROCKS.

BY GUSTAV KOBBE.

ALMOST at the very center of the Atlantic Ocean — only a trifle north of the equator and about half-way between South America and Africa — is a submarine mountain, so high that, in spite of the immense depth of the sea, it thrusts its peak seventy feet above the waves. This peak, startling from its position, forms a labyrinth of islets, the whole not over half a mile in circumference, known as St. Paul's Rocks. So steep is the mountain of which this lonely resting-place of sea-birds is the summit, that one mile from these rocks a five-hundred fathom line with which soundings were attempted by Ross on his voyage to the Antarctic failed to touch bottom.

Were the bed of the sea to be suddenly elevated to a level with the dry land, St. Paul's Rocks would be the cloud-capped peak of a mountain rising in sheer ascent in the midst of a broad plain. They are supposed to have been formed by the same disturbance of nature which separated the Cape Verde Islands from Africa.

Treacherous currents make navigation in the vicinity of these rocks dangerous. A Brazilian naval officer, who passed them on an English steamer, tells me that the evening before they expected to sight them he was told by the captain that at five o'clock in the morning they would appear about five miles west. At that hour the officer went on deck and looked to the westward — nothing but an expanse of heaving sea. He chanced to turn, and there, five miles to the eastward were — the Rocks. The currents had, in less than twelve hours, carried a full-powered steamer ten miles out of her course.

You could count on your fingers the number of human beings who are known to have visited these rocks, but doubtless many a poor cast-away has sought refuge there, only to be swept by the first storm into the pitiless sea. This mountain peak almost at the center of the Atlantic has long been of great interest to scientists. Darwin landed on the Rocks on his voy-

age around the world in the "Beagle." He found much amusement in watching the crabs, which were very numerous, dart out from the crevices and steal the small fish which the noddies or terns had caught and placed beside their nests. He also says that the sharks and seamen had a struggle over every fish which the latter hooked.

Ross's party remained long enough on the rocks for McCormick, the surgeon and scientist of the expedition, to make a map and sketch of them. The sea set in among them with a heavy swell, and the rebound of the surf made the waters in the channels fairly seethe. The terns and gannets hovering over the billows were the first evidence the expedition had that they were approaching these lonely islets. Then two specks upon the horizon were sighted. Gradually one was seen to be dark, the other white,— the dark one being the higher. It was found to be about seventy feet high, and the white peak, on which the gannets had their nests, sixty-one feet. Scant seaweed was the only vegetation on the rocks. A wisp of this and a feather or two were the few and simple materials of which the birds built their nests. He observed that while there were from two to three eggs to a nest, there was not more than one young bird to a pair, and concluded that the crabs, which acted defiantly even toward him, in spite of his rank in the British navy, destroyed most of the eggs.

Sir W. Symonds, another scientist who visited the rocks, relates that he saw the crabs attack nests and capture young birds.

I know of but one man who has been ashore here of recent years. He was an American sea captain who, being becalmed off the Rocks, made use of this opportunity to see them. He found the birds, the crabs, and the swarming sharks; and he found also — a human skeleton, the relic of an ocean tragedy, the fitting companion of this desolate mountain peak rising out of the center of the Atlantic Ocean.